

Orion Junior High School 370 West 2000 North Harrisville, Utah 84414

January 30-31, 2007



Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

Orion Junior High School 370 West 2000 North Harrisville, Utah 84414

January 30-31, 2007

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

DIVISION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, January 30-31, 2007, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Orion Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Steve Elsnab is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Orion Junior High School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Orion Junior High School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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ORION JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Steven C. Elsnab				
Joiney W. Marchait	7 Issistant I interpar			
<u>Counseling</u>				
Steve Short	Counselor			
Laurie Call Moyes	Counselor			
Support Staff				
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Sherrill Lowder	Counseling Secretary			
Olga Cunningham	Options Aide			
Rachelle Knight	Copy Center			
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Marcene Smith	-			
Chris Rowley				
Jason Lewis	11 1			
Rich Wardleigh				
Paul Quilter				
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Chelsea Whitby	-			
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Maxine Barnett	Fine Arts
Karen A. Yonemura	Fine Arts
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Nicholas Reyes	Foreign Language
Dixi C. Rivas	Foreign Language
	Foreign Language
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Brandon J. Fessler	Language Arts
Amy K. Hall	Language Arts
Kara Wardleigh	Language Arts
Teresa V. Billings	Math
Jason Doncouse	Math
Trevor W. Howell	Math
Nancy Hales	Math
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Florence J. Givens	Physical Education and Health
Merrill Harris	Physical Education and Health
Denise Gniot	Resource and Special Education
Jessica Roberts	Resource and Special Education
Debera L. Van Nimwegen	Resource and Special Education
David M. Mellinger	Resource and Special Education
Linda H. Rhees	Social Studies
Linda C. Harrop	Social Studies
Roslyn Farnsworth	

ORION JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

Learn Today. Succeed Tomorrow.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- 1. Student success is enhanced by the shared responsibility of students, staff, parents/guardians, business, and community.
- 2. Programs and services must be focused to prepare students to become successful in society.
- 3. Learning is our highest priority.
- 4. We believe that integrity, trust, respect, responsibility and courtesy are essential to positive interaction.

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

- Dr. Nancy L. Jadallah, Eisenhower Jr. High School, Granite School District, Visiting Team Chairperson
- G. Norma Villar, Oquirrh Hills Middle School, Jordan School District

Mary Carol Greenwood, Syracuse Junior High School, Davis School District

Jessie Kidd, DaVinci Academy, Charter School

Toby Bullock, Orem High School, Alpine School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

ORION JR. HIGH SCHOOL SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Orion Junior High School is a 7-9th grade junior high school located in Weber County and serves approximately 750 students from Lomond View, Green Acres, Majestic and Pioneer Elementary Schools. Orion Junior High students will attend Weber High School.

Orion Junior High School is located in a middle to upper-middle socioeconomic community with a low percentage of minorities. Ninety-four percent of the students at Orion Junior High School are Caucasian. There is a mixture of farming/ranching and light industrial areas within the boundaries.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

The school is largely Caucasian, with only 6 percent minority students. Seventeen students are served in special education classes. There are only eight English language learners. Student attendance averages 94.5 percent. There were only 145 truancies and less than 60 suspensions for the 2006 school year. The data show a low incidence of student discipline issues.

Students at Orion Junior High School score relatively high on the standardized Iowa and SAT tests; their scores are the highest in their school district. With 75 percent (science) to 99 percent (geometry) of the students scoring in the proficient range, very few students score at level 1 or 2.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The school was adequately profiled in the accreditation report.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- Investigate ways to get the community and parents involved on a level other than in response to their own individual students' needs or crises.
- Consider ways in which the staff can collaborate more effectively.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

The school community is new. Orion opened in the fall of 2003 and brought teachers and the administration from North Ogden Junior High School. The self-study process began while these staff members were still at North Ogden. The administrators stated that they had prepared for a visit in the spring of 2004 that never materialized. They have revisited their document this year in preparation for this visit.

The school community engaged in a self-study to a moderate degree. The staff members indicated that they had been a part of the process; however, it was not as collaborative as it might have been. Each of the departments contributed, as did the focus groups, but the overall process was not one of intense interaction between groups. It was not made clear by the staff that there was a collaborative effort

The parents indicated that they were aware of the process, but were not directly involved. Comments were made that parents who might have been involved had moved on, as they no longer had students at Orion Junior High School. The parents also indicated that they received a copy of the manual after it was created, indicating they had not given the opportunity for input of their own.

b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

The self-study, to a large degree, accurately reflects the school's current strengths and limitations. The report mentioned that technology was in need of improvement and that time and opportunity were needed in order to collaborate more effectively.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Orion Junior High School's desired results for student learning are as follows:

1. Literacy: Students will continue to increase in enthusiasm for reading and writing. Students will understand and demonstrate knowledge of reading, writing, and vocabulary.

- 2. Numeracy: Students will continue to increase and use essential mathematical skills.
- 3. Technology/communication: Students will demonstrate the ability to use various computer applications for communication purposes and for school projects.
- 4. Socially acceptable behaviors: Students will be able to demonstrate and perform socially acceptable behavior while attending school at Orion Junior High.

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?

The school staff, students, and the community were all included in the development of the mission/belief statements. The extent of their involvement isn't readily clear, but all groups mentioned were involved to some extent. The PTSA and School Community Council were/are actively involved in school matters, but they appear to trust the school administration's vision of what school beliefs and goals should be. It should be noted, however, that the following recommendation can be found in the School Profile: "Increase understanding, consciousness, and deliberate implementation of Orion Junior High goals." The school community is aware of the need to continue collaboratively developing a vision for student achievement at Orion Junior High.

b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?

To a lesser degree, the school has defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the school community. Members of the staff are committed to student learning, but the belief statements do not adequately reflect their beliefs about student learning. The Visiting Team recommended that they revisit their beliefs and refine them.

The school is relatively new, so the goals, beliefs, and vision generally are still being created. Hopefully, the school community will continue to hone and modify its vision outside of the accreditation process. The basic goal that students will learn is evident in statistics relating to academic achievement. Students perform very well at Orion Junior High. This conclusion is supported quantitatively by school data and anecdotally by the views of parents, staff, and students.

c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

Based on school data and observation, the Visiting Team found the DRSLs to be aligned with the school's mission statement and beliefs. With the population of the school rising, technology will need to be improved and expanded to meet the needs of the student population. As it is, the school is in need of more computers in the library and computer lab, and for student use in the classroom.

Curriculum Development:

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

The action plan defines literacy and numeracy as two standard areas that all teachers will address. All teachers are expected to incorporate regular vocabulary instruction into all classes. A school-wide "Word of the Week" program is in place, with the expectation that all teachers will incorporate the week's word into their curriculum area. Various departments will contribute the weekly word throughout the year. There was little evidence of collaborative work among the staff in the report but, through discussion with the department heads, it is evident that collaborative efforts among the departments do exist. The English and Social Studies Departments have collaborated on units on World War II (reading the play *Anne Frank*) and the Civil War (*Soldier's Heart*). The CTE departmental classes have worked to collaborate with the shop classes on building a model home, and the home economics classes designed the interiors of the model.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

Posters in some classrooms displayed the mission statement and desired results for student learning. The Math Department has a plan to survey the various departments to discover what math skills are needed in their curricula, and ways in which the Math Department can support these skills. There is a plan to organize a multi-departmental collaboration project by August 2008.

Quality Instructional Design:

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

To a large extent, the Visiting Team found that the professional staff had designed and implemented a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students. Teaching styles were varied and developmentally appropriate. Many classes had hands-on, engaging activities for the students. The students mentioned that

teachers were aware of the different learning styles and used kinesthetic, auditory, and visual learning strategies in the classroom. Students were involved in Socratic seminars, small learning groups, cooperative learning, direct instruction, peer instruction, peer tutoring, and others forms of learning. A variety of assessments were used in the classroom, as well, to accommodate different learning styles.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

To a large extent, the Visiting Team observed that a variety of instructional strategies were used to ensure that the needs of different learners were met. Both criterion-referenced and nationally standardized testing supports the claim that students with different learning styles and abilities were effectively learning.

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities that support student learning?

To a large degree, the leadership and professional staff provide additional opportunities that support student learning. Students were able to take field trips, take classes at the high school, compete in sports, attend community events and activities, and participate in after-school activities, clubs, and organizations. Both students and community members can also take advantage of learning opportunities at the school at night. Sports activities and forums are offered.

Quality Assessment Systems:

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

The school has identified school-wide DRSLs in a collaborative process of identifying the learning expectations of their school environment. The school has not developed rubrics to monitor the progress of these expectations, though teachers frequently discuss these DRSLs with students and include them in their course disclosures in order for students to become familiar with these expectations. The school has relied on traditional assessment systems to monitor student achievement. State Core as well as Milestone tests are used to monitor student progress; however it is not clear whether these results are utilized in evaluating current instructional practices to better serve the student population. The staff is encouraged to disaggregate and analyze the data from these tests, then implement these results in assessment development. The Visiting Team recommends that the school investigate innovative assessment strategies/instruments to improve student outcomes in the classroom and school, and use the data from these assessments to drive instruction.

b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?

While it is evident that teaching time is valued, the school lacks a clear understanding of a comprehensive professional development plan for investing in a school-wide assessment plan. It was uncertain the development process used by the school to develop assessment methods reflective of purpose and standard. It was evident from some teachers' use of grading rubrics that performance standards are communicated to students and drive the outcomes of learning. The staff is encouraged to collaboratively develop and utilize appropriate assessment tools to tie back into performance standards and intended outcomes.

c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

The faculty has established a traditional assessment system for measuring student performance. However, the school has yet to collect and assign qualitative value to student work as evidence and a framework for identifying a representation of student performance and attending to collective student outcomes. It is the recommendation of the Visiting Team that the teachers engage in a more collaborative effort to design a comprehensive assessment system.

Leadership for School Improvement:

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?

The leadership, to a moderate degree, allows staff members to attend their choice of professional development activities, and is willing to provide the resources necessary to do so.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?

The staff is supported by the leadership in monitoring student achievement. The staff is proud of the test scores that students have achieved on standardized testing. The leadership, in conjunction with the counseling staff, looks at grade distribution and talks with parents and staff. The leadership also talks with former students to get feedback as to whether they felt prepared to face the high school academics. The leadership states that the district office provides professional development. There is little evidence of school-wide collaboration or school-wide professional development opportunities.

c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?

The leadership, to a small degree, monitors progress of student achievement through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection. The leadership focuses on the CRTs and the Iowa Tests. Beyond that, there is no obvious system of assessment. The leadership looks at core testing and the Iowa Tests to see that progress is being made, and has allowed certain classes to be limited to 15 students, thus making some classes larger. They recognized that math knowledge needed to improve. The leadership places a lot of emphasis on the two standardized tests.

Teachers provide tests, but no evidence of common or formative assessments has been provided to the committee. Teachers have provided verbal comments on how well the students have done.

d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?

To a large extent, the leadership provides the necessary resources for an effective and safe learning environment. All stakeholders mentioned that, with the exception of technology, the leadership provides well for them. The leadership is willing to provide the teaching staff with the supplies and books that are necessary for student learning to take place. The district provides an adoption program for textbooks, and teachers are involved in the selection of the books. The district then provides schools district-wide with the textbooks. The district provides the schools with computers when they need to be replaced (approximately every three and a half to four years). Departments have input on ordering supplies.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

To a large extent, the leadership makes decisions related to the allocation of resources that align with school goals, with the exception of those related to technology. Technology, however, may be a difficult issue to solve presently. The purchasing of new computers is more a space issue than an attitude issue.

The leadership has implemented a math lab class in conjunction with the study hall for struggling math students. Land Trust money is used to fund this lab. It is limited to 15 students, thus making other classes larger. The leadership discussed class size with the departments involved.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

The leadership would like more community involvement, and the community is receptive. The Visiting Team observed great support for the school and the principal, but admittedly they felt they didn't contribute very much to the shared responsibility for student learning. The principal, in conjunction with the PTA, sponsors a luncheon with parents that used to be better attended. The intent of the luncheon was to solicit parental and community input. The administration will try to extend the invitations again in the hope that attendance will improve. The leadership is willing and eager to listen to parents' concerns.

Community Building:

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

To a large extent, the school fosters community building among the staff and students, and between the community and the school. The students commented positively about the climate of the school and the supportive attitude of the teachers, staff, and administration. All staff members who were interviewed spoke of the unified feeling and cohesiveness of the staff, which they fell has a common mission—setting high expectations for learning and having learning be fun and meaningful.

The administration has arranged for a late-start day once a month to allow teachers time to collaborate and meet with members of their departments.

Parents are very supportive of the school, complimentary of the teachers and administration, and willing to be an active part of the school community. They feel their voice is heard and valued. In past years, the principal has invited random parents to join him for a luncheon in which they are asked to give input, discuss any issues or concerns, etc. He also hosts a lunch (or snacks) with his students of the month.

Each of the groups (students, staff, and parents) commented on the impact of cultivating positive relationships and creating a sense of safety, well-being, and trust. Several people across the groups commented on the "nice feeling" they have while at school and that the school is a nice, friendly place to be. There is a great sense of pride on the part of all groups, and a sense of accomplishment. The staff is very dedicated. Students commented on the fact that teachers come early, stay late, and help them in many ways—from help with homework to personal problems to raising a low grade. The students said that the teachers were "the best" and very caring and supportive.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

To a moderate degree, the school extends the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning. Teachers at the school are departmentalized not teamed. While they do collaborate on a limited basis on cross-curricular alignment and integration, they admittedly could use more time to do so.

There is an active PTSA; School Community Council; Ed-line for grading, attendance, and homework issues; a new portal for grading and school/student information; three parent-teacher conferences that are well attended; SEOP conferences; occasional evening parent/student forums; open gymnasium for both students and community members; after-school clubs and activities; and athletics.

The parents sponsor the SWAT (Speaking With a Teen) program at lunchtime. Parents have "a question or topic" that they ask students on a one-to-one basis at lunch. They often give the students who participate a treat. The students admittedly like talking with the adults. Also, the parents host the Life Skills Program, a career orientation program wherein community members are invited to come and speak on particular careers. Students are allowed to select three career paths. Counselors additionally sponsor Careerville, a 7th grade activity similar to Reality Town, a simulation exercise in which students are introduced to the real world of careers.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

To a limited degree, the school builds skills and capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement. Teachers are encouraged to attend workshops or conferences, and the school often pays the registration fees. There are lots of opportunities for teachers to attend professional development on an individual basis, but not as a whole staff.

Occasionally, the district will come to the school and present to the staff on a particular topic. However, there does not appear to be a comprehensive plan in place. The late start time is used for department meetings and staff collaboration, but not specifically for professional development. The administration and staff stated that "when the need comes up, we ask for help," but ongoing professional development is not viewed as a high priority.

b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

To a limited extent, the school creates conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement. The school is in its fourth year of operation, and thus still in its infancy. Even the students made noted that some changes need to be made just because the school is a new entity; there are no traditions for Orion Junior High School.

Because the students at Orion Junior High School perform well on both standardized tests and the state's criterion-based assessments, the Visiting Team did not sense a noticeable need to improve on the part of the staff. The Visiting Team noticed that there does not seem to be a need for continuous improvement, as manifested by a lack of interest and lack of perceived need for professional development.

Again, because of the "newness" of the school, contemplation of productive change was not evident when conversing with parents, staff or the administration.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Most Utah public junior high/middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, but only by the USOE—it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?

To a limited degree, the school-wide action plan adequately addresses the critical areas for follow-up. The Visiting Team observed that there is not a professional development plan in place to address the need for implementing effective instructional strategies in the areas of literacy and numeracy, two of the student DRSLs. It is recommended that the staff and administration consider the need for ongoing and continuous improvement by providing adequate professional development for the staff.

Additionally, the Visiting Team observed the need for continued and increased opportunities for teacher collaboration. Each of the departments noted the need for collaboration, but the need was not addressed in the action plan. It is recommended by the Visiting Team that the issue of collaboration be addressed, and a plan for providing adequate time for collaboration, as well as the structure to support collaboration, be considered.

b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

To a limited extent, there is sufficient commitment to the action plan school-wide but system-wide, although the Visiting Team felt that the parents and paraprofessionals were unaware of the action plan and not directly involved in the process of its creation. The Visiting Team felt that the staff was vested to a large extent to the action plan, however.

Parents were for the most part supportive of the plan, but admittedly were not involved directly in the development of the plan.

d) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?

The Visiting Team felt that the staff and administration did not see accreditation as a process, but as more of an event, as evidenced by the fact that the report was written in 2003-2004 but not revisited until this year, the year of the visit. In conversations with staff, there did not appear to be any understanding that accreditation is ongoing, fluid and focused on continuous improvement; the staff did not see the need for a professional development plan.

The Visiting Team felt that there was some complacency on the part of the staff, whose members often stated that things are just fine the way they are and there is no need for professional development. One teacher said they didn't want any more training. Another teacher remarked that they could not get together and discuss student work because they could not agree upon what quality work would look like. In order to teach writing, it is necessary for all teachers to understand the expectation for student writing. They should be able to determine what quality student work looks like, and it should be the standard.

The Visiting Team agreed that there was no stated process for monitoring the accomplishments of the action plan.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the school for the sense of comaraderie among the staff and students.
- The Visiting Team commends the staff members on their school spirit and competitiveness.
- The Visiting Team commends the school on its sense of school pride and sense of environmental awareness. The staff and students are also very grateful for what they have at Orion.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for its academic accomplishments and performance.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration for its sense of vision and for a willingness to give voice to the students, parents, and staff.
- The Visiting Team commends the counseling staff for its supportive and direct services to students and its open door policy to students and parents.
- The Visiting Team commends the teaching staff on its willingness to use effective and developmentally appropriate instructional strategies that are engaging to adolescents.
- The Visiting Team commends the counseling staff for its stellar efforts with the 8th grade SEOPs, resulting in a whopping 95 percent attendance rate for parents and students

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends the staff and administration create an ongoing and continuous professional development plan of best practices.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school investigate innovative assessment strategies/instruments to improve student outcomes in the classroom.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school take a holistic approach to educating the child.

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school implement structures that support systemic collaboration on instructional and organizational strategies.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school make additional efforts to include parents and paraprofessionals in the ongoing process of accreditation.
- The Visiting Team recommends the school community be educated on the process of accreditation, i.e., that it is not segmented and compartmentalized, but rather interactive and collaborative, and that it is ongoing and continuous, not a single event. Collaboration is a living, breathing, integrated daily function of the school.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school community revisit the DRSLs, mission statement, belief statements, and action plan and focus on student learning.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the administration bring in a state or district facilitator to educate all stakeholders (staff, paraprofessionals, parents, administration, and students) about the new accreditation process and its collaborative nature.